

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

The following listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application.

LISTING OF CLAIMS

1. (currently amended) A joining system, comprising:
 - a main unit having a control device; and
 - a joining unit including at least a first module and a second module;
 - a plurality of process software each operable to conduct a joining operation for each of a plurality of programmed welding operations;
 - a plurality of welding process parameters defined for each of the plurality of programmed welding operations;
 - a plurality of parameter blocks each having at least one of the welding process parameters, each parameter block assignable to one of the plurality of welding operations; and
 - a program operable to interrogate only selected ones of the plurality of welding process parameters common to selected ones of the parameter blocks defined as a parameter block type and prevent interrogation of remaining ones of the parameter blocks not of the parameter block type;wherein the control device operably recognizes a compatibility of at least the first module, the second module and the main unit.
2. (original) The joining system of Claim 1, further comprising a series of fastening elements operably secured by the first module.
3. (original) The joining system of Claim 2, comprising a welding arc operably provided by the first module wherein the welding arc is operable to weld the fastening elements.
4. (original) The joining system of Claim 3, wherein the first module further comprises a lifting device which operably moves each of the fastening elements away

from a workpiece to be welded after an initial low current arc is created and then moves each of the fastening elements toward the workpiece after a higher current welding arc has been created by the first module.

5. (original) The joining system of Claim 1, wherein the main unit comprises a non-volatile memory accessible by the control device.

6. (original) The joining system of Claim 5, wherein the non-volatile memory comprises a flash memory containing blocks of software programs.

7. (currently amended) The joining system of Claim 6, further comprising:
a random access memory accessible by the control device;
an operator terminal connected to the control device, the operator terminal allowing manual operator control of the control device; and
a the plurality of welding process parameters being stored in the random access memory.

8. (original) The joining system of Claim 1, further comprising:
operating system software;
first process software operable to control a first welding process for a first fastening element;
second process software operable to control a second welding process for a second fastening element having a different characteristic than that of the first welding process;
analysis software; and
communications software;
wherein each of the software is accessible by the main unit.

9. (original) The joining system of Claim 8, comprising:
a steel material for the first fastening elements wherein the first process software operably controls welding of the first fastening elements; and

an aluminium-based material for the second fastening elements wherein the second process software operably controls welding of the second fastening elements.

10. (original) The joining system of Claim 8, comprising:
a first shape of the first fastening elements wherein the first process software operably controls welding of the first fastening elements; and
a second and different shape of the second fastening elements wherein the second process software operably controls welding of the second fastening elements.

11. (original) The joining system of Claim 1, wherein the first module of the joining unit is a first welding module and the second module of the joining unit is a fastener feeding module.

12. (original) The joining system of Claim 11, further comprising a plurality of fasteners, wherein the joining unit further includes a second welding module, the fastener feeding module operably supplying the fasteners in a pneumatic manner to both the first and second welding modules.

13. (original) The joining system of Claim 8, further comprising a process parameter block stored in a memory accessible by the control device for each of the first and second process software.

14. (original) The joining system of Claim 13, wherein each of the first and second process software operably controls an arc welding process.

15. (original) The joining system of Claim 1, further comprising:
a metallic fastening element; and
a metallic sheet having a mating surface;

wherein the control device operably causes the first module of the joining unit to initially clean the mating surface and then subsequently weld the fastening element to the mating surface.

16. (original) The joining system of Claim 1, comprising:
a plurality of programming of the control device;
wherein the control device operably determines a compatibility of the joining unit with the programming of the control device.
17. (currently amended) The joining system of Claim 1, further comprising:
~~a plurality of stored process software; and~~
a code operably allowing one of access to and disablement of the stored process software.
18. (original) The joining system of Claim 1, comprising:
a recognition procedure;
wherein the control device operably repeats the recognition procedure to determine mutual compatibility of at least the modules of the joining unit and the main unit at regular intervals.

19. (currently amended) An arc welding system, comprising:
a computerized control device; and
memory connected to the control device, the memory having stored
therein at least the following computer program modules:
first process software operable to control a first welding process;
and
second process software operable to control a second welding
process different than that of the first welding process;
a plurality of process software each operable to conduct a joining
operation for each of the first and second welding processes;
a plurality of welding process parameters defined for each of the first and
second welding processes;
a plurality of parameter blocks each having at least one of the welding
process parameters, each parameter block assignable to one of the first and second
welding processes; and
a program operable to interrogate only selected ones of the plurality of
welding process parameters and to prevent interrogation of remaining ones of the
welding process parameters;
the control device automatically accessing the appropriate process
software depending upon an equipment type connected to the welding system.

20. (original) The arc welding system of Claim 19, further comprising:
a plurality of fasteners; and
an arc welding module operably arc welding each of the fasteners to a
workpiece;
wherein the control device operably actuates the arc welding
module.

21. (original) The arc welding system of Claim 20, comprising:
an initial low current arc operably created by the arc welding
module;

a high current welding arc operably created by the arc welding module; and

 a lifting device included with the arc welding module;

 wherein the lifting device operably moves each of the fasteners away from the workpiece after the initial low current arc is created and then moves each of the fasteners toward the workpiece after the high current welding arc is created.

22. (original) The arc welding system of Claim 19, comprising:

 a plurality of steel first fastening elements wherein the first process software operably controls welding of the first fastening elements; and

 a plurality of aluminium-based second fastening elements wherein the second process software operably controls welding of the second fastening elements.

23. (original) The arc welding system of Claim 19, comprising:

 a plurality of first fastening elements having a first shape, wherein the first process software operably controls welding of the first fastening elements; and

 a plurality of second fastening elements having a second shape different from the first shape, wherein the second process software operably controls welding of the second fastening elements.

24. (currently amended) The arc welding system of Claim 19, further comprising:

 a random access memory accessible by the control device;

 an operator terminal connected to the control device, the operator terminal allowing manual operator control of the control device; and

 a the plurality of welding process parameters being stored in the random access memory.

25. (original) The arc welding system of Claim 19, further comprising:

a joining unit operably controlled by the control device; and
a plurality of programming of the control device;
wherein the control device operably determines compatibility
of the joining unit with the programming of the control device.

26. (original) The arc welding system of Claim 19, comprising a code
operably allowing one of access to and disablement of the stored first and second
process software.

27. (canceled)

28. (original) The arc welding system of Claim 19, wherein the memory
comprises a non-volatile flash memory having the software contained in a plurality of
blocks.

29. (currently amended) A method of operating a joining system having a main controlling unit and a metal joining unit, the method comprising:

communicating between the main controlling unit and the joining unit using a plurality of process software; and

recognizing a compatibility of at least a portion of the joining unit with the main controlling unit;

storing the plurality of process software in a memory of the main controlling unit;

defining a plurality of parameters in each of a plurality of parameter blocks divisible as a parameter block type for each of the plurality of process software; and

interrogating only a portion of the plurality of parameters, the portion defining only relevant ones of the parameters of a parameter block type for the process software while preventing interrogation of remaining non-portion ones of the parameters.

30. (original) The method of Claim 29, comprising:

feeding a metallic weld stud from a first module of the joining unit to a second module of the joining unit; and

creating an electrical arc for welding of the weld stud using the second module.

31. (original) The method of Claim 30, comprising:

querying as to whether the joining unit is compatible with any of a plurality of computer programs accessible by the main controlling unit; and

enabling at least one of the computer programs which controls welding if the joining unit is compatible with the queried computer program.

32. (original) The method of Claim 29, comprising accessing any one of the computer programs operable to control a welding process within a flash memory in communication with the main controlling unit.

33. (canceled)

34. (currently amended) The method of Claim 29, comprising preventing repeated polling of parameters which are not contained in one of the parameter block types during programming of parameter blocks of the same type for successive welding operations within an overall process.

35. (original) A method of operating an arc welding system having a controller and a plurality of machines associated with elements to be welded, the method comprising:

- (a) transmitting a signal between the controller and at least one of the machines;
- (b) ascertaining if a predetermined code is present;
- (c) allowing implementation of a first computer program if the predetermined code is of a first type;
- (d) implementing a second computer program if the predetermined code is of a second type; and
- (e) energizing the machines for arc welding in response to the appropriate computer program implementation in the controller.

36. (original) The method of Claim 35, comprising:
feeding a metallic weld stud from a first of the machines to a second of the machines; and
creating an electrical arc for welding of the weld stud using the second of the machines.

37. (original) The method of Claim 35, comprising:
querying as to whether the machines are compatible with any of the
computer programs; and
enabling at least one of the computer programs which controls weld
processing if a corresponding one of the machines is compatible with the enabled
computer program.

38. (original) The method of Claim 35, comprising accessing one of the
computer programs for controlling weld processing within a flash memory in
communication with the controller.

39. (original) The method of Claim 37, comprising:
selecting a parameter block type from a memory containing a plurality of
welding parameters; and
interrogating only select ones of the parameters which are of relevance to
the enabled computer program which controls weld processing.

40. (original) The method of Claim 35, comprising polling at least one of the
computer programs at regular but delayed intervals.